DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 076 560 SP 006 491

TITLE	Open Schools and the Teacher.
INSTITUTION	National Education Association, Washington, D.C. Div. of Instruction and Professional Development.
PUB DATE	Feb 73
NOTE	4p.; Briefing Memo, number 2, February, 1973
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Experimental Schools; *Open Education; *Student Centered Curriculum; *Teaching Methods; *Teaching Procedures; Teaching Programs

ABSTRACT

A necessary consequence of openness in schools is the abandonment of rigidly prescribed curricular programs. Requirements of an "open schools" program include the open behavior of a teacher, which will come voluntarily or not at all, and informed, involved, and supportive parents. The limited research to date indicates that student goals, motivation, enthusiasm, and independence are enlarged in an open setting. But open classroom cannot simply be transplanted from one setting to another; they must be original efforts. The National Education Association supports the efforts of any teacher attempting to incorporate, within school policy, open school behavior and activities in his classroom. (A bibliography is included.) (JA)

FORM 510

PRINTED IN U.S.A.

ED 076560

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Briefing MEMO ipd

INSTRUCTION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

FEBRUARY, 1973 • NO. 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

OPEN SCHOOLS AND THE TEACHER

The idea of open schools, like open marriages, open sandwiches, and open shops, will mean something different to each of us depending on our past experiences, our expectations, our purposes, and the degree of openness we can tolerate in a given situation.

Today many varieties of open education are to be found in the land. Yet a certain amount of confusion over terminology and practice clouds the meaning and limits wider adoption by schools of the best practices within this growing movement. One way to begin an examination of this idea is to consider some of the meanings of that wonderfully liberating English word open:

> *To make more responsive or understanding; susceptible, inviting; willing to hear and consider or to accept and deal with; characterized by ready accessibility and cooperative attitude; candid, characterized by a lack of pretense; presenting no obstacle to passage or view; free of prejudice; to remove obstructions from; receptive to new ideas and arguments:* an open mind.

Combining the concepts of "openness" and "schooling" is an idea that some consider a contradiction in terms. Others see it as an idea whose time has come--a long overdue approach to a really humane, individualized kind of learning. Since the essence of this idea is based on its flexibility, many of its practices are difficult to describe.

The concept of open schools comes primarily from the British infant schools (pupils aged 5-8). The work of A. S. Neill, one of the early pioneers in this movement at Summerhill, is almost as well known in this country as it is in England. The idea received its first popular introduction to the U.S. through the writing of Joseph Featherstone and later gained strong support from Charles E. Silberman who urged its acceptance and lauded the efforts of North Dakota in this direction. The NEA, through its Schools for the 70's and other programs, has helped teachers become familiar with the ideas emanating from this movement.

SP 006 491

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

Although the open school idea originated in early childhood education and the terminology has been applied almost exclusively to the elementary level, many secondary and continuing education programs are now adopting flexible scheduling, minicourses, and other innovative approaches designed to open up the school to the rich resources of the surrounding environment. The open university, which also had its origin in England, is perhaps one of the most exciting educational phenomena of recent times.

A necessary consequence of openness in the school is the abandonment of rigidly prescribed curricular programs. A basic component is the ability of the teacher to create a rich learning environment with a variety of resources appropriate to the continually evolving interests and capacities of individual children. The focus is on making provisions for and guiding learning rather than prescribing and directing it. This, of course, implies the necessity of the teacher's being able to make continuing diagnostic decisions about students and learning events. It presupposes an atmosphere of warmth, encouragement, and respect for each person.

Predictably, open schools have generated bitter political battles. Proponents have stressed the humane, individualistic concerns; opponents, the lack of emphasis on what they perceive to be basic skills and traditional discipline. These discussions often have little to do with the central idea of opening up the learning environment.

Various and sundry names have been given to the open school. The term has also been used to describe the architectural and physical characteristics of school buildings, but since many such open settings continue in the tradition of the self-contained classroom, this narrow physical definition often has little or no application to the instructional program.

Value to Students and Teachers

Although open schools have not been in existence long enough to permit long-range studies of their effectiveness, research conducted to date suggests that student achievement as measured by standardized tests is comparable to that attained through more traditional approaches. Many have observed that student goals are enlarged in an open setting; observational and experiential accounts overwhelmingly attest to the dramatic increase of motivation, enthusiasm, and independence among students and teachers. Parents who have been actively involved often share these feelings.

Obviously the shift from the traditional to the open classroom is very demanding for any teacher, and some very effective teachers may find it difficult, if not impossible. But to those who are interested in this technique and are working in a potentially sympathetic situation, the open school approach appears to offer new vistas for professional creativity, expression, and reward.

Some Constraints

Open classrooms are most emphatically not finished products that can be transplanted from one situation to another. Nor can they be unilaterally imposed upon a teaching staff; there is no faculty now in existence that can be expected to function in open classrooms without some preparation and guidance in this mode of teaching. The most essential element of open classrooms is the "open" behavior of the teacher, which will come voluntarily or not at all. And it must be genuine.

Just as important at the outset are informed, involved, and supportive parents. A school district with a suspicious and polarized community would be ill advised to create open schools without first working to obtain strong parental support.

There are, of course, a variety of ways in which every teacher can strive to make his classroom more joyful, humane, and creative. The literature now available on open schools provides valuable cues, insights, and suggestions.

Recommendations to Local Affiliates

1. We strongly urge that the Association support, and if necessary defend, the efforts of any teacher attempting to incorporate open school behaviors and activities in his classroom, provided that they fall within the limits of adopted school policy.

2. We urge that any school policy restricting such professional behavior be modified to allow it.

3. Minimal conditions for the adoption of such a program by a school faculty would include:

   a. staff determination of program desirability

   b. voluntary participation of all staff

   c. provision of in-service education programs sufficient to satisfy staff needs as judged by the staff

   d. existence of potential community support and staff commitment to develop it

   e. assurance of administrative commitment to provide all necessary resources as identified by the staff

   f. provision for evaluation or revision, or even abandonment, of the project without penalty or loss of prestige.

For More Information on Open Schools

Barth, Roland S., and Rathbone, Charles H. A Bibliography of Open Education. Newton, Mass.: Education Development Center, 1971. Unpaged. $1.25. Includes several hundred references, plus 22 motion pictures.

Bremer, Anne, and Bremmer, John. Open Education, A Beginning. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972. 183 pp. $5.95. The authors encourage teachers to abandon their conventional roles at a time when society is forcing role change for students, parents, and others. " . . . the way to teach is to avoid being a teacher."

Clegg, Sir Alec. Revolution in the British Primary Schools. Washington, D.C.: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1971. 48 pp. $2.50. Written by a leader of the quiet revolution that has transformed British primary education since 1945, this booklet suggests how American teachers can profit from the British experience. Foreword by Charles E. Silberman.

Frazier, Alexander. Open Schools for Children. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1972. 86 pp. $3.75. "Openness," says Frazier, "is the most powerful and germinal idea on the education scene today." This work examines what is happening to the open concept in the education of children.

National School Public Relations Association. Informal Education: 'Open Classroom' Provides Change, Controversy. Arlington, Va.: the Association, 1972. 60 pp. $4.00.

Neill, A.S. "Neill! Neill! Orange Peel!" New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1972. 538 pp. $4.00. "Obedience implies fear, and that should be the last emotion encouraged in a school . . . I have come to believe that the greatest reform required in our schools is the abolition of that chasm between young and old which perpetuates paternalism," says the 80-year-old Neill in this lively autobiography. Expounding his radical ideas about education, sex, politics, and psychology, Neill looks to the future of Summerhill, the school he founded 50 years ago.

Rathbone, Charles H. "Examining the Open Education Classroom." School Review 80: 521-49; August 1972. This comprehensive paper describes organization of space, time, children, instruction, and takes a critical approach to such matters as definition, appropriateness, and evaluation. The author, who is director of the New City School in St. Louis, supplements this piece with a useful bibliography.

An Annotated Bibliography on Open Schools. 1973. Available without charge from IPD/NEA. (See box below.)

This *Briefing Memo* is a response to requests from members for information on the above topic. It has been prepared by the Instruction and Professional Development staff of the National Education Association as a brief but accurate introduction to this topic for busy teachers and as a resource for readers who wish to pursue the subject in more detail. Except where indicated, the views expressed here do not represent official Association policy. This document has not been copyrighted and permission is granted herewith to members of the United Teaching Profession who may reproduce it in full or in part for non-commercial use provided credit is given to the NEA.

For information on other *Briefing Memo* topics, write or call the Information Center, Instruction and Professional Development, National Education Association, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D. C. 20036. Phone: (202) 833-4337.